

CARMEN FLOREA, *The Late Medieval Cult of the Saints. Universal Developments within Local Contexts. Sanctity in Global Perspective*, 8 (London – New York: Routledge, 2022)

Late Medieval Transylvania becomes in this study the subject for researching a multivalent topic – the cult of saints analysed in a historical dimension –, an area still less cultivated by the Romanian medievalists, but highly successful and well positioned within contemporary western historiography. The book, published in a thematic series by one of the most prestigious academic publishing houses of the present, aims to address the sanctity models of Latin Christianity and the mechanisms of their diffusion, development and transformation during the 13th-16th centuries, in a regional paradigm strongly attached to the concept of “frontier society”. Therefore, the local manifestations of universal cults became the main direction of research the author undertook. Carmen Florea conducted a triple analysis, determined by and within the most vigorous ecclesiastical milieus of this historical province: the episcopate of Transylvania, the mendicant convents of the Dominicans and Franciscans, and the parishes of the most important urban communities.

The argumentative approach layered in this way was faithfully replicated in the book’s structure. Three main chapters, along with their related subsections, explore each of these three environments. In turn, an introduction and a concluding part distinguish themselves from the actual chapters. The author also included several auxiliary materials: a list of images (35 in number, both colour and black and white), maps (seven different cartographic representations), abbreviations, a list of places mentioned in the text by their current name (accompanied by their Hungarian and German denominations, following the good tradition of historical works concerning Transylvania), and a final index, which brings together thematic, onomastic and toponymical lemmas. One unusual editorial choice was to replace the final bibliography with five intermediary ones, immediately after the explanatory endnotes of each part mentioned above.

The introduction (p. 1-37) gradually reveals the topic and the challenges the author faced during her research. The conceptual framework, referential historiography, the methods and models of investigation, as well as the available Transylvanian sources (various but not that numerous for such an endeavour) were presented in a concise manner, along with the themes the argument would insist on. Ecclesiastical dedications (since the patron saint of a church is the main indicator of a cult engaged in a well-determined environment) and devotions cultivated in certain contexts (both historical and religious) are the main witnesses that can record and reproduce the rhythm universal cults disseminated and modernised themselves by adapting to the needs and requests of a challenging Transylvanian society. Therefore, the dynamics of holy patronage and the multiplication of cults were influenced in a

composite manner by the three agents previously mentioned, whose contributions were extensively analysed in the subsequent chapters.

The first chapter (p. 38-142) is dedicated to the episcopate's impact on the promotion of various cults through prominent canons and energetic bishops, both in the cathedral of Alba Iulia and the diocese, during the 13th-16th centuries. The role of the episcopal see appears to have been a very special one, as it represented a channel through which the cults of several patron saints of the cathedral's side altars and chapels were disseminated in Transylvania, assuming, in turn, the holy patronage of parish churches. From a historical point of view, the phenomenon presents some variations. The first two centuries are characterized by a rather slow multiplication of cults at episcopal level. Traditional saints were favoured, such as St. Michael, the Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, or the Apostles, but they also enjoyed a wide reception at parish level. However, during the same period, given the strong episcopal and parochial support alike, some new devotions entered and spread in Transylvania, such as the Eucharistic one, associated with the feast of *Corpus Christi*. In the 15th-16th centuries, the rhythm of renewal intensified. The number of saints venerated in the Alba Iulia cathedral increased due to personal devotions of the episcopal clergy and their interaction with some traditional cults, strongly supported locally. From this point of view, the cathedral church became a space for self-representation and the cults, intensively promoted in these circumstances (such as those of the holy kings of Hungary, Stephen, Emeric, and Ladislaus, of the saintly martyrs, Dorothea, Barbara, Katherine, Margaret, but also of Mary-Magdalen and Anne, or of the holy bishops, Nicholas and Martin), acquired new reverberations in the Transylvanian society.

The second chapter (p. 143-211) aims to scrutinize the contributions the Dominican and the Franciscan orders made to the practice of saints' cults in medieval Transylvania, starting with the establishment of the first convents in the 13th century, especially in urban settlements, until their dissolution, determined by the Protestant Reformation's success in the middle of the 16th century. Creators of their own ecclesiastical network and vectors for the modernization of medieval sanctity, the Transylvanian presence of these mendicant friars was interrogated from three convergent perspectives: the diversification of the cults they promoted, resulting from the holy patronage options of their conventual churches, when compared to the parish ones; their adaptability to the missionary characteristics assumed by the two orders in this region; the innovation stimulated by the observant movement, which led to a further diversification of sanctity models and dissemination channels. Usually, the convents of these two orders were placed under the protection of saints who would avoid replicating the dedication of nearby parish churches, but who, at the same time, would add up to the available sanctity models and validate the apostolate assumed by the friars. This is precisely why the mendicant convents, although deeply attached to the universal cult of the Virgin Mary, when the local parish church was already under her protection, they could take over the patronage of the Holy Cross, St. Peter and Paul, or St. John the Evangelist, even at the expense of any of the recently canonized saints within the two orders. The expansion of the observant movement

brought new challenges and conducts, such as nunneries and lay devotional confraternities. At the same time, it further stimulated the competition between the Dominicans and the Franciscans, as they continued to multiply and innovate the profiles of other archaic saints, alongside those originating from within the orders, in response to the new realities, both inside and outside their cloisters.

The third and last chapter (p. 212-306) traces the dynamics of holy patronage among the parishes from the most significant urban settlements in the region: Sibiu (the Virgin Mary), Braşov (the Virgin Mary), Bistriţa (St. Nicholas) and Cluj (St. Michael). Characterized by greater autonomy, due to their “free royal town” status – from which also derived the privilege to freely elect the parish priest –, these towns’ establishment and development were influenced by an emerging urban elite, highly active in both social and religious life. Its members were deeply interested in the (re)construction of their representative community church, in accordance with the mono-parochial profile of the communities they governed. Emphasizing in the background the differences which set apart the medieval history of these four Transylvanian towns (especially Cluj), the analysis mainly highlights: the mechanisms through which the cult for the patron saint of the parish church became a fundamental element in the articulation of a civic religion; the development of complementary devotional cults (especially that of *Corpus Christi*), sanctioned by the urban magistrate and under the careful supervision of the parish clergy; the dialogue with the local mendicant convents, sometimes conflictual, sometimes consensual. The convergent approach of these four case studies captures the dominant position of the lay authorities in relation to the parish office, whose representative usually came from the most important families, thus maximizing the prospects of collaboration with the town magistrate. The research also reveals the institutional levers which facilitated the channelling and structuring of religious life for the entire community, anticipating the success and diffusion of the forthcoming Protestant Reformation in Transylvania, from the urban environment downwards.

The conclusions of the book (p. 307-317) briefly resume the premises and the main arguments on the basis of which the demonstration follows the emergence, multiplication and dissemination of available sanctity models in a marginal province of Latin Christendom, as it is seen from the Holy See perspective, and in which the Eastern influences contribute in a decisive manner to the shaping of various cults of saints. From these points of view, Late Medieval Transylvania reveals itself as a receptive area, where the archaic models of sanctity, although predominant in manifestation, were constantly subject to innovations and transformations. The triple analysis – episcopal, mendicant, and parochial at an urban level – accurately captures the particularities of this process in its historical paradigm.

The results of this research are as valuable as they will be further connected to other similar manifestations from other European areas and, at the same time, will stimulate and inspire local investigations of subsequent subjects and themes. Finally, it must be emphasized that Carmen Florea’s book does not sum up the features of a monographic work, as, in fact, the author herself does not explicitly assume this venture. For example, several important

ecclesiastical institutions (such as the abbeys of the Benedictines in Cluj-Mănăştur, or of the Cistercians in Cârța), with a clear interest in promoting various cults, remain outside the main analysis. Nevertheless, the entire study is a genuine demonstration of putting into a wider context several bits and pieces of information, definitely parsimonious, yet symptomatic for the shaping of saints' cults towards the end of the Middle Ages.

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